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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I - KHOURY-KINCANNON

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SUBJECT: PRT KIRKUK: PC BOYCOTT: PARTIES AGREE TO FORMAL
NEGOTIATIONS, NO MOVEMENT YET

REF: A) 06 KIRKUK 172

B) 06 KIRKUK 177

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Calls for "joint administration" dominated a January 12 meeting called to find an end to the Arab-Turkoman boycott of the Kirkuk Provincial Council. Despite apparent agreement at that meeting, the Arab and Turokman blocs have failed to follow up and appear to be uninterested in serious negotiations to end the boycott. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) As reported in reftels, since November 2006, most Arab and Turkoman Kirkuk Provincial Council (PC) members have boycotted its weekly sessions and select committee meetings, presenting varied and shifting demands. Without the boycotting members, only PC members elected on the Kurdish-dominated Kurdish Brotherhood List (KBL) have participated in PC business. PC Chairman Rizgar Ali Hamajan (PUK) is unwilling to use the KBL's majority to play hardball with boycotters, claiming that doing so would fatally harm relations among the communities. He has said that the KBL is willing to continue governing without the boycotters indefinitely, though he has consulted informally with boycotting members on issues concerning them, such as public-works projects.

13. (U) In December 2006, the Arab and Turkoman blocs called on CF to help enforce an August 8, 2005 agreement among the blocs requiring "joint administration" (division of provincial jobs among Kirkuk's major ethno-religious communities). Since the boycott began, PRT staff have encouraged all parties to find a solution, and the members of the blocs have been negotiating informally behind the scenes. On February 1, 2007, the KBL began a very public campaign to end the boycott, issuing, at a televised event, an open letter inviting boycotting blocs to enter into a public dialogue with the KBL to resolve all outstanding issues. This drew no response and, on February 12, CF called the blocs to a meeting in an attempt to clarify the boycotters' demands and move forward.

THE FEBRUARY 12 MEETING: WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?

14. (U) Talk of joint administration dominated the meeting. Though long a touchstone and rallying cry for boycotting Turkoman PC members, when asked about it individually, their ideas of what it would mean in practice vary widely, with most calling for a 32-32-32 percent split of provincial Director General (DG) positions among Kurds, Turkomen, and Arabs (with the remaining 4 percent going to Chaldo-Assyrians). At the February 12 meeting, this understanding seemed to prevail, with the Turkoman bloc pushing the point. Arab bloc concerns centered on alleged extra-judicial detentions of Arabs by Kurdish security forces in the KRG and implementation of Iraqi constitution Article 140.

15. (U) PC Chairman Rizgar proposed a "reconciliation" committee

composed of one representative from each bloc to "coordinate" future negotiations, to which the Arab and Turkoman blocs agreed. He also agreed to provide a written KBL response to the Arab and Turkoman blocs. The KBL response on February 13 was largely an extension of the August 8, 2005 agreement, proposing a form of joint administration, offering to continue cooperation on detainee issues and project allocation (which it was already doing), and reaffirming its support for Article 140.

TURKOMEN RAISE THE STAKES, KURDS HOPEFUL, ARABS HAPPY TO KEEP
BOYCOTTING

16. (U) On February 16, Turkoman member of the reconciliation committee Hasan Torhan (Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF)) rejected the KBL's reply as nothing more than a rehash of the August 8, 2005 agreement, which the Turkoman bloc had abandoned because the KBL had failed to implement it. He said that the Turkoman bloc would not consider distribution of DG positions until the KBL had agreed to an equitable division of positions in higher tiers of the provincial government, such as the Governor, the Deputy Governor, and the PC Chairman positions. He denied that this was a change from previous proposals and insisted that the KBL would have to address this demand.

17. (U) On February 18, KBL member of the reconciliation committee Awad Amin Mohammed (Kurdistan Toiler's Party, KBL) dismissed Torhan's demand that the highest tiers of the provincial government be equally distributed among Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomen and rejected a 32-32-32-4 percent split of DG positions as a starting point for negotiation, as such positions ought to be granted according to qualification rather than ethnicity. Though he said that the Arab bloc appeared more flexible than the Turkoman bloc, Awad said that

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KBL would not pursue separate agreements as all parties had agreed to resolve the boycott through multilateral talks and the KBL was committed to the process.

18. (U) Awad felt that all blocs had passed a "psychological barrier" and were ready for open and honest discussion. However, reaching an agreement might take several months, and Awad urged CF patience; he added that any resolution would be short term because Kirkuk's future status has yet to be determined. He said that the PC can alleviate Arab and Turkoman "fears" about Article 140; however, Awad suspects that some really wish to stop Article 140 altogether, which is beyond the PC's authority and cannot be solved in Kirkuk.

19. (U) On February 19, at the weekly meeting of the Hawijah Area Council (Hawijah is a district in the western, Sunni Arab-majority part of the province) the Arab member of the reconciliation committee, Rakan Saed Al-Jabouri, said that the boycott had been productive, "reversing four years of mistakes," and pointed to the CF-organized February 12 meeting as evidence. Chairman and influential sheikh Hussein al-Jubouri (a.k.a. Abu Saddam) said that it was irrelevant whether Arab PC members attend PC sessions, as the KBL has a majority and can do what it pleases. Later, in a rare candid moment, he told PRT staff that the goal of the boycott is to de-legitimize PC decisions by withholding minority participation.

110. (U) On February 18, KBL member of the reconciliation committee Awad had complained that he had been trying to meet his Arab and Turkoman counterparts, but they had stood him up more than once. On February 20, PC Chairman Rizgar reiterated that Awad was in Kirkuk and available to meet; however, the other two members of the committee had gone to Baghdad, visiting Prime Minister Maliki "to complain about the Kurds."

COMMENT: RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE

111. (SBU) Though Hasan Torhan is the titular head of the Turkoman

bloc in the PC, at the February 12 meeting that bloc was obviously led by Ali Mehdi (Turkoman Eli party), who is known for his ideological aggressiveness rather than his flexibility and is widely regarded as a paid agent of Ankara. Moreover, at the meeting, Turkoman bloc member Zhala al-Nafitchi (ITF) accused the Kurds of "playing games," a remark regarded locally as a deliberate and particularly bold insult. In addition, Turkoman PC members later made press statements complaining that KBL was "not trustworthy." Torhan then raised the stakes by demanding an equal division of the province's top political offices even before discussing the division of DGs, yet has failed to attend reconciliation committee meetings. Taken together, these acts indicate that the Turkoman bloc is uninterested in negotiating seriously. This could be because what it wants -- a reversal of Article 140 -- is not available to them in Kirkuk, as Awad suggests.

¶12. (SBU) What the Arab bloc wants is unclear. Its members are extremely individualistic, rarely presenting a united front and typically preoccupied with their own particular complaints. Though Rakan is emerging as Kirkuk Arabs bloc's man in the PC, the bloc lacks leadership. His and Abu Saddam's remarks indicate that the Arab bloc has no program and no reason to end its boycott. In conjunction with Rakan's absence from reconciliation committee meetings, these suggest that the Arab bloc is uninterested in negotiating. Additionally, Abu Saddam's remarks support PC Chairman Rizgar's opinion, expressed privately, that the elites among Kirkuk's indigenous Arabs will never accept being equal to and sharing power with Kirkuk's other communities.

¶13. (SBU) Despite this opinion, Rizgar is pragmatic in dealing with Arab leaders, though he prefers (and has asked the PRT to support) non-sheikh Arabs such as Rakan. Rizgar is a shrewd politician who understands that he needs some minority support to see Article 140 through, and one of his consistent public themes is minority acceptance. His ability to deliver Kirkuk to the KRG will make or break him within the PUK. At the same time, as suggested by Awad's remark that any solution to the boycott will be short-term, Kurds are unwilling to buy Arab or Turkoman support at too high a price. That is, for the sake of ending the boycott now, they will not make precedent-setting deals (such as giving up the Governor or PC Chairman positions) that they might regret later, after provincial elections and Article 140 implementation, when their control of the province will be reinforced. The KBL's February 13 response reflects this, offering almost nothing new, and is probably the furthest that the KBL is willing to go.